

January 8, 1955

Mr. Patrick M. Malin, Exec. Dir.,
American Civil Liberties Union
170 Fifth Avenue
New York 10, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Malin:

In the light of the magnificent work that the ACLU is doing, over all, in the field of civil liberties, my present remarks are doubtless picayune. You may nevertheless wish them made, as I do, for accuracy of record.

My exception is taken to your remark at page 39 of the 34th annual report, which I have just received, that "reputable American biologists indicate that the evidence of the research laboratory demands further consideration of the Lysenko theory." I do not know how this remark can, in fact, be justified.

It is true that the press has repeatedly distorted statements given by geneticists at scientific meetings; indeed it is hardly possible to give a paper on genetic research that has any bearing on genetic stability or variation without attracting the attention of reporters who look for political significance in it. I understand Lysenko's theories, from his own publications, to mean a repudiation of the role of the chromosomes as significant factors in heredity, and I do not know of any experimental work to offer any support for such a doctrine.

It is likely that your impressions on this subject have come from such news articles as appeared, for example, in the New York Times of June 10, 1954, concerning experiments on drug resistance in bacteria, a field which is of particular interest to me. But as you can readily verify by consulting Dr. Eagle, the remarks falsely attributed to him constitute a gross distortion. Too many newspapers have found this approach the most sensational aspect of recent genetic research; it is unfortunate that so reputable a paper as the Times should be so reckless, and in turn, perhaps have misled persons like yourself. It is easy to see how error can be propagated.

I was pleased to note your remark on the turnabout in Russian "official genetics". While most of my colleagues have been most acutely concerned about Lysenkism as meaning the official decision of scientific "truth", you may be interested to know that the Genetics Society of America at one time considered establishing a committee to correct public misunderstanding of the scientific issues of "Lysenkism". In distinction to the private opinion represented by this letter, this move was strongly opposed by many members (including myself) who felt this would be in fact a step towards officializing genetic doctrine. A committee was set up, but its instructions